



Sunday 5th December 2021:

Advent - Peace

1. Reading:

Ephesians 2: 14-22

...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

2. Questions:

- a) Share with one another your experiences of coming to faith in Christ Jesus. Andrew referred to his awareness of God's peace as confirmation of God's love, forgiveness and acceptance.
- b) In the light of all that we heard in the Bible Project video about God's Peace in the Old and New Testaments what do these things tell us about why the coming messiah would be called 'Prince of Peace. (It might be helpful to rerun the video for your group.)
- c) Jesus calls us to be peacemakers in the world, Matthew 5:9. In what ways are we do this? Consider conflict between two brothers or sisters in Christ, how should we apply the principles of Matthew 18:15-17?
- d) Reflect on John 14:27, *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.* In what ways did Jesus bring peace to the people he met during his ministry on earth? Jesus says these words to his disciples as he is about to leave them and in the preceding verse, he promises them that they will soon receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. See also Galatians 5:22, the fruit of the Spirit which includes 'peace'.

3. Prayer

Pray for the peace of Christ to come upon the lives of those whom God has placed on your heart.

Pray for the situations of conflict in the world, for those who are working for peace. Share the places and situations that you are aware of and pray into them.

Advent Prayer for Peace.

Emmanuel,
 Humanity waits in darkness longing for your light.
 In the centre of darkness, rekindle our hope.
 As we wait for peace in the midst of war, be with us.
 As we pray for families to be reunited, be with us.
 As we pray for enemies to be reconciled, be with us.
 As we pray for lands to be restored, be with us.
 As we pray for long-term security, be with us.
 As we pray for kindness and community, be with us.
 Restore and set right our relationships.
 Replace the darkness in our hearts with your light and joy.
 Let your word set alight the hope the world needs
 to bring to life your love and justice.
 Amen.

Blessing

Hebrews 13:20,21 Now may the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

4. Text of the Sermon:

Advent - Peace

This morning we begin the first of four Advent / Christmas messages, which focus on single words, Peace, Joy, Hope and Love. This Sunday on Peace, in your Bulletin we have listed the Advent and Christmas services, the next Sunday on Joy with a Youth and Children's Nativity and on 19th Dec our Carol service on the theme of Hope and finally on Christmas Eve 11.00 pm Communion Service on Love.

Christmas cards are being written. We received our first on Friday last week and some of them emphasize one or more of these words Peace, Joy, Hope and Love, here are some of ours from last year, I keep them and use the pictures for present tags the following year!

Three weeks ago, I spoke on the Hebrew word 'Shalom' which is translated as 'Peace'. We saw that it also means much more than that for the lives of individuals and of the whole community.

For each of these four messages we are going to watch a video prepared by the Bible Project by way of introduction. Here is their video on the word Peace. Video: [Shalom - Peace - YouTube](#)

There is a lot in the video and yes he does speak quite quickly, a lot to take in.

Acts 10 – Peters realization

Last Sunday Ash referred to the story of Cornelius in Acts 10. I thought this would be a good place to start in looking at the word peace. As we have seen in the video, in the OT God's peace or Shalom was upon the people of Israel, they were a people blessed and nurtured by God to be a shining example to the surrounding nations. Today do we consider that God's good news was only for them or for others as well?

In Acts 10 we see how two men, the Apostle Peter and the centurion from the Italian Regiment, Cornelius received visions from God. Peter in a state of hunger saw a vision of a sheet being lowered and raised to heaven three times with all sorts of animals on it and a voice saying that he could eat anything on the sheet. Cornelius, a devout and God-fearing man receives a visitation from an Angel asking him to send men to Joppa to find Peter and bring him back to his house. All of that transpired and through this experience, Cornelius and his household came to believe the good news of Jesus and received the Holy Spirit and Peter realized that the peace of God had come upon the Gentiles.

Acts 10: 34 says Then Peter began to speak: 'I now realise how true it is that God does not show favouritism 35 but accepts from every nation the one who fears him and does what is right. You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, announcing the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all.

And although Peter and the Apostle Paul have their differences over the law and what practices are appropriate for the new Gentile believers, Paul too comes to realise the profound consequences of the work of Christ on the cross for all people. Note the inclusive nature of Peter and Paul's language in the use of words like '**all**' and '**every**' when referring to all that Christ has done.

Ephesians 2 – Paul's Realisation.

In this reading from Paul's letter to the Ephesians hear how many times he uses the word '**peace**'.

*Ephesians 2:14-22 ...remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ. 14 For he himself is **our peace**, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus **making peace**, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the*

cross, by which he put to death their hostility. 17 He came and **preached peace** to you who were far away **and peace** to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit.

I think we have got it! It is through Christ that the peace of God comes.

Christ is our peace

The way that God has brought about salvation for the Gentiles is through the life and death of Jesus God's Son and His resurrection. So when Paul says. **'Christ is our peace'** he literally means that Christ has made it possible for individuals to find reconciliation and peace with God and for divided humanity to become one in Him. Humanity restored through Christ who is the Shalom of God.

And when on Christmas Eve or Christmas Day we read the wonderful words that are used to express the greatness of what God has done in Christ we read,

*Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, **Prince of Peace.***

We see that God has been about his work of reconciliation and restoration and wholeness and **in Christ God's Peace has come**. Therefore Jesus is the center of our faith because it is only in Jesus that God's peace comes to us and His peace 'there will be no end'.

Prince of Peace, Isaiah 9: 6-8

*For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.*

*And he will be called
Wonderful Counsellor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.*

*⁷Of the greatness of his government and peace
there will be no end.*

*He will reign on David's throne
and over his kingdom,
establishing and upholding it
with justice and righteousness
from that time on and for ever.*

*The zeal of the Lord Almighty
will accomplish this.*

We have talked a lot about 'We not Me' over the past few weeks and it has been fascinating to see how the culture of our day has filtered into our faith thinking, into the songs we sing and into our theology and I hope that you have found it a useful counter balance. We are to be so much more than a group of individuals brought together by a

common faith. We are nothing less than the Body of Christ, or at least part His body. God's peace is with us in community.

But the experience of peace does need to be discovered for each one of us so that we can become the people that we are called to be. So, in addition to Peter and Paul's realization there must also be your realization of all that Jesus has done for us and mine that we too might know His peace.

Our / My Realisation - Christ is our Peace

I was brought up in a Christian home, I was blessed, my Mum and Dad were very loving, I felt entirely safe and nurtured, they didn't have many material things and never seemed to covet them. They loved one another they loved me and my sister and they had faith. And I can say to any parents here this morning, don't question the beneficial impact on your children of your love for them and your faith in God. Be good parents and be true to your faith, live it out, let them see your faith in action it will speak to them for the whole of their lives.

I say that because at the time that I was growing up faith seemed so tied up with respectability and duty that it placed a pressure on me to meet expectations. I was brought up in an Anglican church in Matlock, Derbyshire, a traditional church of England church. My Dad was churchwarden and well respected, and I felt the weight of responsibility of not doing anything that would let him down. And before you imagine that I am now going to go to tell you a story of letting him down, I am not! I don't think I did let him down, not too many times anyway. I wasn't the perfect child but I largely conformed. But it meant that I became a worrier, frightened of letting people down, anxious about what I was doing.

The point of this is that it affected my view of faith. It seemed that it required me to comply with certain behaviours, in order to be accepted by God. Do these things and God will not condemn you. It was what I had picked up, my misinterpretation of how God sees us and how I thought he saw me. So, in my mind any misdemeanor meant that I was unworthy of God's love. God was entirely justified in his judgement of me.

Thankfully I discovered the error of this view of God when I came to University in Manchester. I became friends with a group of young people who were Christians and they seemed to have a different view of God. They talked about God's love a lot, they loved reading their Bibles (up to that point I had read some Bible stories of course but I wouldn't have generally chosen to read the Bible), and they enjoyed singing worship songs, rather than the hymns that I was familiar with, and praising God. And I was drawn to them and wanted to be amongst them and have what they had.

I began reading the Bible, a Good News translation with all those marvelous sketches. And I came to realise how much God loved me, me and everyone else but he loved me and wanted me to be whole, to be free from worry and to live a fulfilling life with meaning and purpose. And in that Bible in the letter to the Philippian church I read this.

Philippians 4: 4-7 *Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 **And the peace of God**, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

I gave my life to Christ and he changed me. And the change that took place in me was the overwhelming experience of God's peace upon me.

God, pure, holy, perfect, blessing me with His peace, His beautiful presence His peace filled me. I put my trust in Christ for the forgiveness of my sins and he washed me clean, it's the old language but I don't know any better words to describe it. He made me whole. I had found God's peace in Christ, Christ was my peace.

Remember the meaning of Shalom, God's Peace, it isn't only an absence of conflict, it is a blessing, it is the presence of wholeness, it is restoration and joy.

Application

How can we picture what peace looks like in the face of conflict and distress? Last Friday the BBC shared this story, you may have seen it. Interesting how short a time a good news story stays in the media, I saved the link as soon as I saw it and looked for it on the news website yesterday and it had gone.

It is a story about an Afghan family fleeing from Kabul as the Americans left the city in August of this year. **Burhan Vesal** had been an interpreter for the British forces in Afghanistan. When the Taliban took over, he was scared they would murder him and his family. So, Burhan, his wife Narcis, a gynaecologist, and son Sepehr endured the chaos at the airport, scenes that we all saw on our TV screens, and managed to get onto an RAF flight the day before a suicide bomb exploded at the airport.

Like thousands of other Afghans brought to the UK, they have spent the past 100 days in hotel rooms. But this week they arrived in Aberdeen after a 10-hour car journey and were met by Helga Macfarlane who has heard about their plight and offered them a new home. In a remarkable way their story resonated with hers.

Video <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-59504516>

I don't know if that lady is a Christian or not and this isn't a story of someone finding faith in Jesus but what I do see is the powerful impact of the actions of a kind and generous woman providing a new home for a family who have come from a place of danger and of turmoil in their lives and finding a place of safety a place of peace.

You can feel the relief on the face of Narcis, on the delight of young Sepehr having his own room and new toys and in the words of **Burhan**. "*Generous people help you when you are in a dark place and they come and put a light into your room.*" This family has **experienced peace**, undeserved mercy from a stranger prompted by her own story and a thankful heart for the kindness that her own Mother received years before.

What the video didn't say was that Helga's mother was a Silesian refugee in World War 2 having also been an interpreter for the British army. She had fled Germany with her own mother and sister and it was only through the kindness of other people along the way who had hidden them and given them food, and help from the British Red Cross, that she had made it to Britain.

Helga said, *"This was the time to give back something for the kindness and the humanity that had helped my mother and family survive" "You're part of our family now. And you're so welcome."*

Advent

As we look ahead to Christ's coming at this Advent time. We hear the words of the angels as they met with the shepherds, ordinary folk like you and I.

Luke 2: 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favour rests.'

His favour rest upon us. Christ has come...

Do you know the peace of God that I have been speaking of this morning? Do you know it for yourself? The good news of this message is that God's peace is available to all who turn to Him. You are worthy of God's peace and it comes to you through the saving work of Jesus Christ, his death on the cross for your sins and mine and His saving power through the resurrection when he overcame death and now lives forever. Christ is our peace.